



September 2014

All to Play For

The battle for women's votes before the 2015 General Election



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Introduction

1 Introduction

If current predictions are anything to go by, the 2015 General Election looks set to be the UK's tightest and most unpredictable political race for generations.

It's now a year since Mumsnet and Ipsos MORI published their first joint report into which party was winning the battle for the female vote. It showed that Labour had secured a strong lead among women voters across most demographic groups, regardless of whether the results were broken down by age, employment or social class.

Since then, the day-to-day business of government has given way to the manifesto churn of political parties in preparation for the election next May - one aspect of which has been a ramped-up effort by all three parties to target women.

That drive has been visible across a wide range of policy proposals. This report reveals the impact those proposals have had on the UK's women voters, whether they're grandmothers or working parents, stay-at-home-mums or childless professionals.

Key findings include:

- The female vote remains up for grabs, with a striking six out of 10 women voters (58%) saying they may change their mind between now and next May. The figure is 53% for men
- Women are still significantly more likely to back Labour than the Conservatives, but the gap has narrowed over the course of the last year from 14 points to nine
- There has been one notable shift since the 2013 report: older women are now more likely to back the Tories than Labour
- All the main parties appear to have a leadership problem when it comes to female voters. The highest net satisfaction rating, for UKIP's Nigel Farage, is a paltry -16 (compared with a positive rating among men). The lowest, for Nick Clegg, is -37
- 48% of women (and 51% of men) think Labour should change its leader before the election, compared with just 29% for the Conservatives
- Results suggest that if London Mayor Boris Johnson were to take charge it could boost the party's support across the genders, and significantly cut into Labour's lead among women - although whether voters would really react to him like that is another question



9 points

The Labour lead over the Conservatives among women - down from 14 points in 2013.



- Finally, a large majority of both women and men believe the country would be better run if there were more women in parliament and at the Cabinet table

It is important to stress that female voters are not a homogenous group, and will never deliver a block vote; in fact, this research underlines the many differences that exist between them. But women nevertheless have shared interests and concerns, and it is those that politicians of all colours are trying desperately to tap into.

This research proves that it is very much worth their while to continue with those efforts.

1.1 Tapping into the female vote...

Domestic violence, internet security and female genital mutilation are subjects that should concern us all. Yet in driving forward policies that address these issues, MPs believe that they are speaking in particular to women. The same is true with household budgets, the dogged focus of Labour campaigns, or free school meals and childcare, pushed by the Liberal Democrats. Promoting women onto boards, meanwhile, has become a major preoccupation for David Cameron - and the prime minister ensured, in his latest ministerial shake-up, that it was female MPs who were most likely to be seen walking into No 10.

This report drills down into how the political land lies now, following these efforts by all three main parties. It does that through Ipsos MORI polling, but also via a series of in-depth, online focus groups that were designed to get below the surface of the headline figures.

Last year, we identified a “women problem” for the Conservative party. This was driven not by Mr Cameron losing female support (his losses are spread evenly across the sexes), but rather by large Labour gains from the remaining parties, in particular the Lib Dems. It’s worth noting that 14% of those who say they would vote Labour tomorrow had backed the Liberal Democrats in 2010. For the Conservatives, that figure is just 3%.

That shift handed Mr Miliband a 14% lead among women in last year’s research. That gap has narrowed, but the fact that it remains significant at 9% is something Tory strategists will wish to understand. They will take comfort, however, from the fact that, while Labour continues to do well among younger, professional women, the Conservatives now have the lead among middle class, older women: a group that is more likely to vote than others, particularly when compared to their younger counterparts.

Despite a big effort from the Liberal Democrats to reach out to female voters, the picture that emerges from this research is not a pretty one for the party. The headline figure has 11% of women saying they will vote Lib Dem, compared with the 26% who did so in 2010. Mr Clegg’s satisfaction rates



14%

The proportion of female 2010 LibDem voters who say they are now certain to back Labour



are also poor, with 46% of women saying the Lib Dems should replace him before May.

Behind the statistics, the news remains grim for the Lib Dem leader. Once again, as it did last year, the issue of integrity damage caused in particular by his tuition fee U-turn is raised time and again.

Mr Cameron receives a more mixed reception in the focus groups, with some describing him as out of touch, while others express respect and liking for him. His ministerial reshuffle is largely dismissed as window dressing, however, with several respondents suggesting it shows little respect for female voters' intelligence.

Mr Miliband, while faring better than Clegg, gets a worse write-up than Cameron – with a number of respondents describing him as ineffectual and weak. While there is some praise for his attempts to reach out to women, many conclude they cannot imagine him in Number 10.

As for Ukip's Mr Farage, he is best compared to Marmite: admired by some as the only leader willing to stand by his principles; viscerally disliked by others. Some, meanwhile, take both positions at once, saying they find him genuine while disagreeing with all his views.

In fact, in conclusion, the key theme to emerge from the research is a sense among many women that every one of the options on offer turns them off. Take these typical comments:

"David Cameron knows nothing about people in the real world. Nick Clegg has no leadership skills. Ed is a buffoon. Nigel Farage - a waste of space."

"It is not something I ever thought I would say but I can't agree on any party at this moment."

"I have absolutely no idea who to pick from. To be honest, I'd feel happier voting in Basil Brush."



46%

The proportion of women who think the LibDems should change leader.



2 The Polling

2.1 Votes up for grabs

Over the next eight months, political parties will pour money into their election efforts - much of it targeted at those marginal constituencies that will determine the overall result.

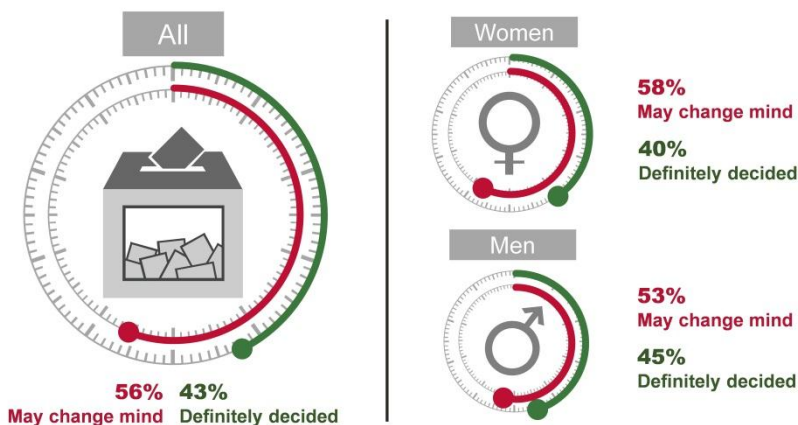
This chart reveals the vast potential number of women voters who are yet to be entirely won over.

The 40% of women who have definitely decided which way they will vote is well behind the 58% who say they could still change their mind.

Among men, the gap between those who have decided and those who may change their mind is eight points.

Nearly six in ten women voters say they may change their mind before 2015 – the same as men

"As you may know, the next General Election is expected to take place in May 2015. Have you definitely decided to vote for the ... party or is there a chance you may change your mind before you vote?"



Base: 1,003 British adults 18+, 9th – 11th August 2014

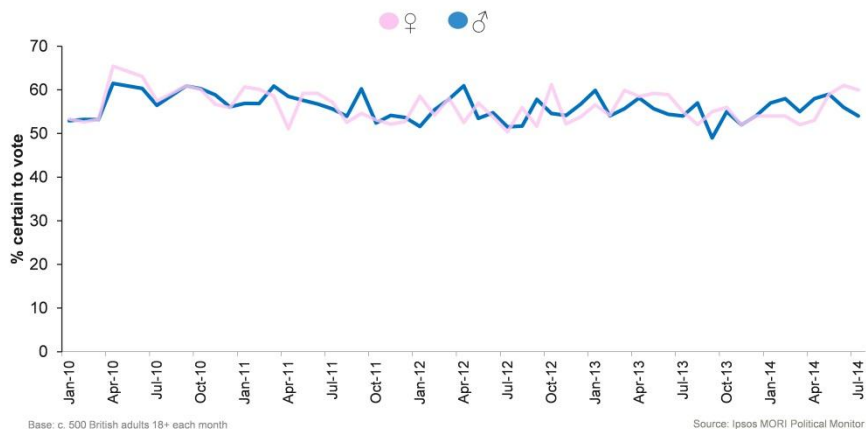
Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

Yet as we can see, this is not a sign of apathy. Female voters may not be fully persuaded about who they will back, but they nevertheless plan to turn out in high numbers. The figures outlining those certain to vote have been constantly high, and around the same level for both sexes.

Men and women equally likely to say they are certain to vote

*"How likely would you be to vote in an immediate General Election, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 means you would be absolutely certain to vote, and 1 means that you would be absolutely certain not to vote?"**

**All those certain to vote*



2.2 How they would vote if there were an election tomorrow...

These charts compare how women and men voted in 2010 with how they are feeling now. They also provide a snapshot of the thinking last summer, in 2013, when this report was first published, to illustrate how things are shifting.

The Conservative party led among both men and women in the last general election. However, it is worth noting that the gap between it and the Labour party was half the size among female voters (5 points) than among their male counterparts (10 points).

Since then, the performance of Mr Cameron's party has fluctuated similarly across the sexes, dropping eight points by 2013, and rising by two for women this year.

However, with the dominance of the two main parties continuing to decline, votes do not simply transfer between Labour and the Conservatives as they once did. In fact, Labour has seen a magnified boost among women – largely driven; it seems, by Lib Dem deserters.

Among women, support for Labour rose by 11 points to 42% in last year's poll, giving it a 14-point lead. This year Labour support is back at 39%, leaving the overall gap between the two biggest parties slightly smaller. But at nine points, it remains significant, particularly when compared with men, for whom the gap is just 1%.

As for the Liberal Democrats, they have leaked support. Over a quarter (one in four) of women voters backed Nick Clegg's party in 2010, but that figure has slumped to just above one in 10. One suggestion made by commentators is that significant numbers of voters on the left of British politics remain unhappy that the Liberal Democrats entered into a coalition with the Conservatives. Failure to stick to their promise to vote against tuition fees has also raised questions about integrity which the party still struggles to bat away. And Labour seems to be the option that many disillusioned Lib Dem voters are choosing.

Ukip meanwhile, cannot be ignored. While the party is more popular with male voters, it nevertheless enjoys significant levels of support among women. Later charts outline to whom Ukip poses the biggest threat.



2 points

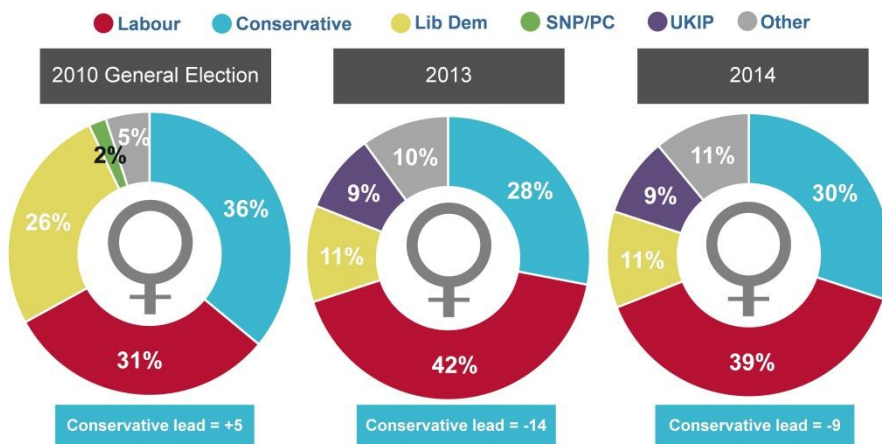
The increase in Conservative vote share among women since 2013.



Aggregated Women's voting intention over this Parliament

"How would you vote if there were a general election tomorrow?"*

*All certain to vote



Base:

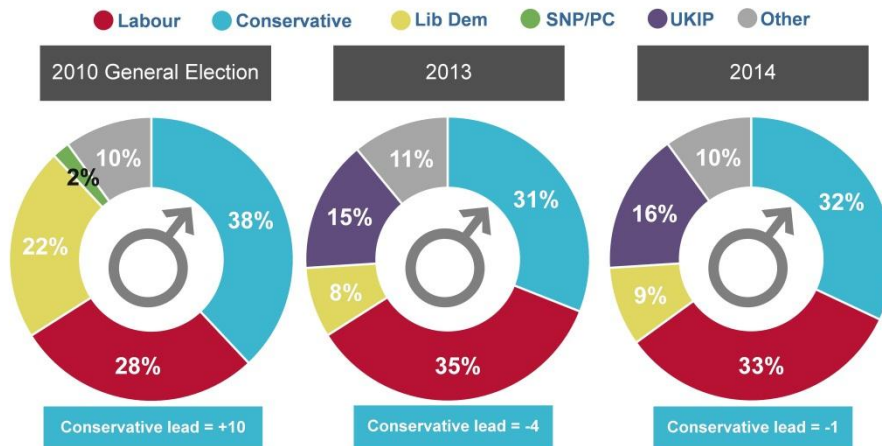
- 2010 figures based on stated intention on 10,211 British adults 18+, 19th March - 5th May 2010
- 2013 figures based on the aggregated voting intention of 3,675 British adults 18+, January - July 2013.
- 2014 figures based on the aggregated voting intention of 3,626 British adults 18+ January - July 2014.

Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

Aggregated Men's voting intention over this Parliament

"How would you vote if there were a general election tomorrow?"*

*All certain to vote



Base:

- 2010 figures based on stated intention on 10,211 British adults 18+, 19th March - 5th May 2010
- 2013 figures based on the aggregated voting intention of 3,675 British adults 18+, January - July 2013.
- 2014 figures based on the aggregated voting intention of 3,626 British adults 18+ January - July 2014.

Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

3 The Demographics

3.1 Age

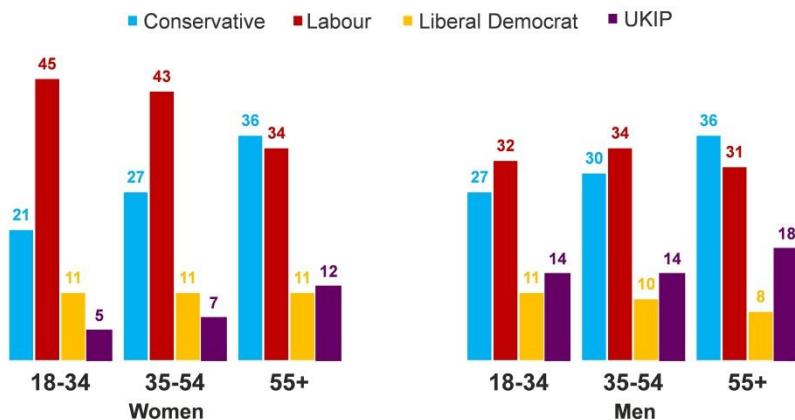
One of the most interesting trends in 2013 was that in the vast majority of cases Labour was still ahead with women, on most secondary criteria (age, class, homeownership etc). But one change that will please the Conservatives is the voting intentions of older women. In 2013, 36% of women over 55 said they would vote Labour and 33% would back the Conservatives. This year that has changed, with the Conservatives now ahead on 36% and Labour slipping back slightly to 34%. Given that Tory advisers talk about this older group as being particularly important to their election strategy, this is especially significant. Further statistics suggest that the Tory lead in this older group is driven by middle class women; Labour remains ahead among working class over-55s.

Despite this positive news, however, Mr Cameron's party will want to understand why Labour continues to be so far ahead among voting women of all other ages. The gap is particularly wide among those aged 18 to 34, with whom Labour has a hefty 24-point lead. Once again, additional data can be used to show that this lead is especially strong among young, professional women – perhaps too young to be tempted yet by tax-free childcare.

Aggregated voting intention by age- Jan to July 2014

"How would you vote if there were a general election tomorrow?"*

*All certain to vote



Base Aggregated voting intention of 3,626 British adults 18+ Jan- July 2014

Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor



36%

The proportion of women aged 55+ who say they will vote Conservative; the highest support of any party in that age group...



...however,

24 points

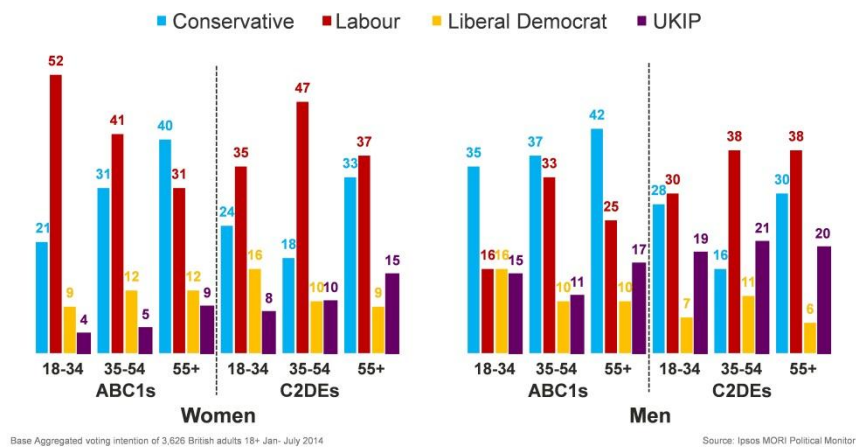
Is the lead Labour enjoys over the Conservatives among women aged 18-34.



Aggregated voting intention by age within class - Jan to July 2014: Labour ahead among younger, professional women.

"How would you vote if there were a general election tomorrow?"*

*All certain to vote



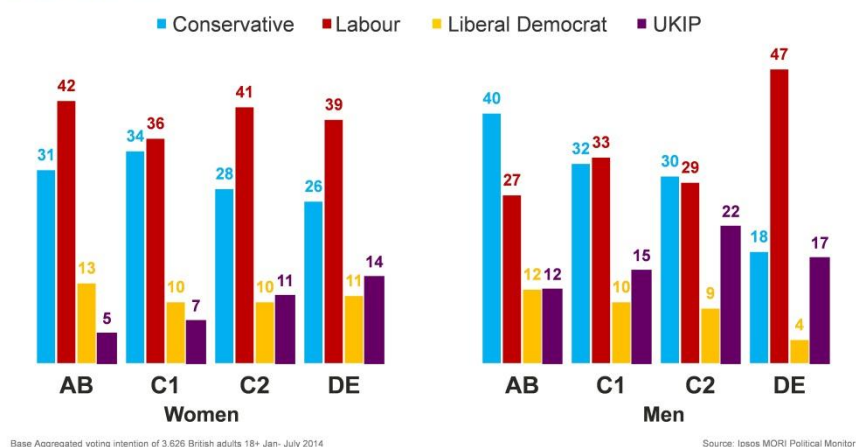
3.2 Class

When age is discounted but voters are broken down by social class, the figures tend to show a similar trend this year to last. While men in socioeconomic group AB are more likely to support the Conservatives, women in all groups back Labour overall. But, as explained above, this doesn't take into account the fact that young, better-off women tend towards Labour, while older ones tend to the Tories.

Aggregated voting intention by class - Jan to July 2014

"How would you vote if there were a general election tomorrow?"*

*All certain to vote



3.3 Public and private sectors

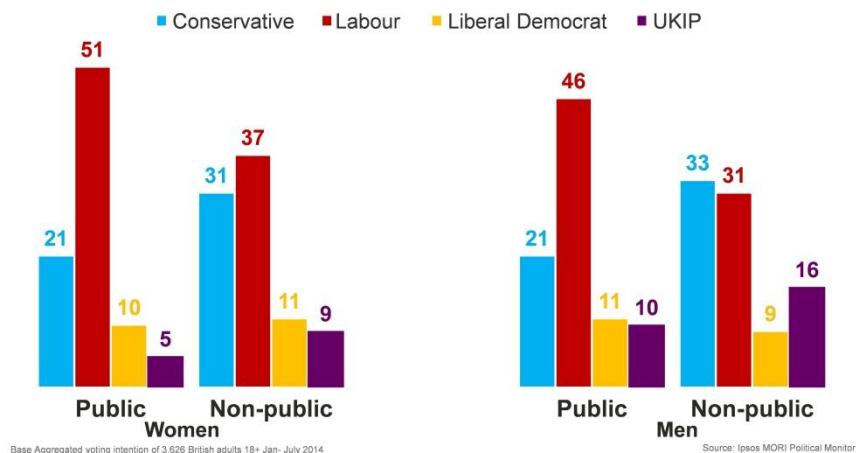
The research also breaks down voters by those working in the public and private sectors. Not surprisingly, Labour has a strong lead across the board with those in the public sector. Alongside a historical trend for this, the Coalition has introduced policies that affect public sector workers in terms of pay and pensions. Labour, meanwhile, has focused its efforts on demonstrating how the austerity drive has hit women in particular – although its decision to support public sector pay plans upset the unions. Still, Labour retains a massive 30-point lead among public sector women in this poll, next to a 25-point gap among men.

Reflecting the patterns seen in the class analysis it is again interesting to note that while private sector male workers are more likely to vote Tory, Labour has led among women in this group since 2011.

Aggregated voting intention by sector - Jan to July 2014: Labour ahead among women in both private and public sectors

"How would you vote if there were a general election tomorrow?"*

*All certain to vote



3.4 Tenure

Last year, when voters were broken down into women of different groups (by age, job, class etc) there was one key group where the Tories were in the lead: women who owned a property outright, without a mortgage as well as those who live in the South.

This year the Tories are once again just ahead with these very particular groups.

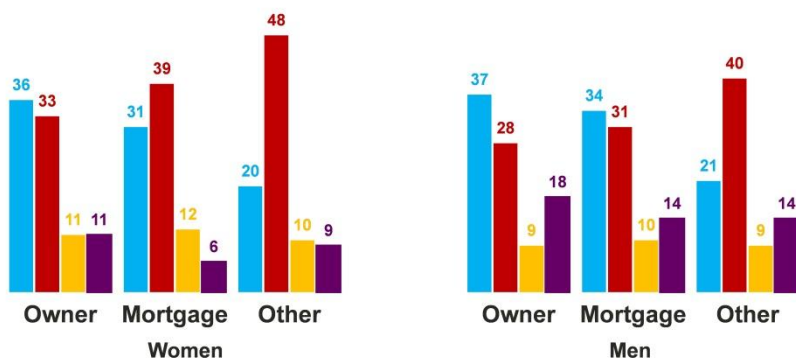
Women with mortgages back Labour in bigger numbers, as opposed to men in the same group who are more likely to vote Tory.

Aggregated voting intention by tenure - Jan to July 2014: Conservatives lead among men mortgage-holders, but Labour ahead among women

"How would you vote if there were a general election tomorrow?"*

*All certain to vote

■ Conservative ■ Labour ■ Liberal Democrat ■ UKIP



Base Aggregated voting intention of 3,626 British adults 18+ Jan- July 2014

Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

4 The Leaders

4.1 I can't get no... satisfaction

You know something's wrong when the highest net satisfaction rating given by women to a political leader is -16 - and that to Nigel Farage, the head of a party that has yet to prove itself in a general election. Men are much kinder to Mr Farage, giving him a positive rating of +3.

Despite Labour's overall lead among women, its leader's satisfaction rates are broadly similar to those of the prime minister: -22 compared with -21. When we bring in the scores for men, which are better for Mr Cameron on -13 but worse for Mr Miliband on -28, a picture of deep dissatisfaction with the Labour leader starts to emerge. The results pose a significant problem for Mr Miliband, given that when people vote Labour they have to expect that he will be the man walking through the door of Downing Street.

If it isn't Mr Miliband who is attracting women to Labour, then, it could be dissatisfaction with the government. Female voters provide a net score to the Coalition of -34, compared with -18 for men. And this dissatisfaction with the Coalition may be one factor contributing to Liberal Democratic leader Nick Clegg's rating - the lowest of the four on -37, among both male and female voters.



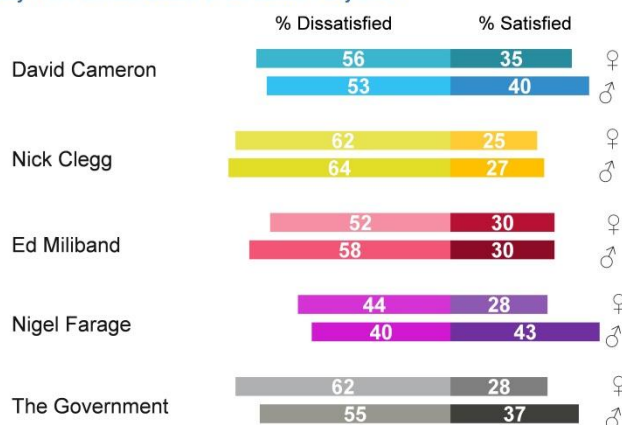
-16

Nigel Farage's net satisfaction rating among women.



Satisfaction ratings – women less satisfied with government and Farage especially, and with Cameron

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way ... is running the country /doing his job as Prime Minister /Deputy Prime Minister/Leader of the Labour Party/UKIP?

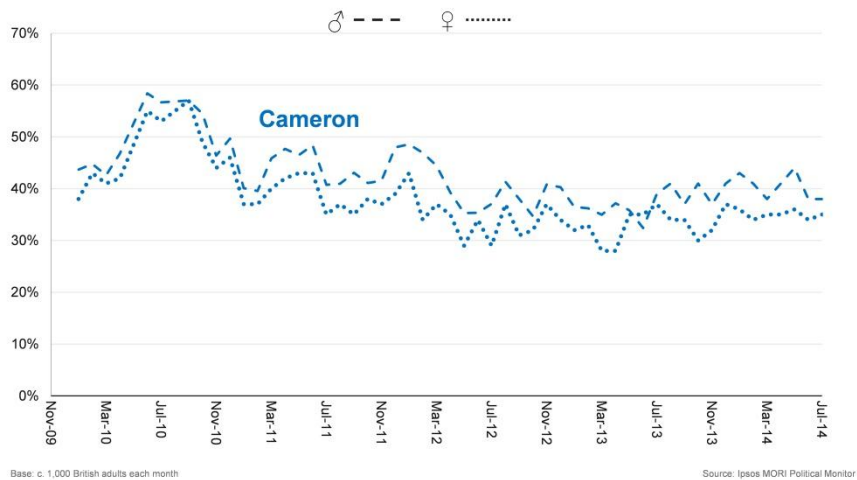


Base: Aggregated satisfaction ratings of 7,053 British adults 18+ Jan- July 2014, 3,611 women, 3,442 men

Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

However, the Conservatives may also be worried to see how David Cameron's gender satisfaction gap (women are not as impressed with him as men) is one that has tended to endure for a number of years now.

David Cameron's satisfaction ratings over time - by gender



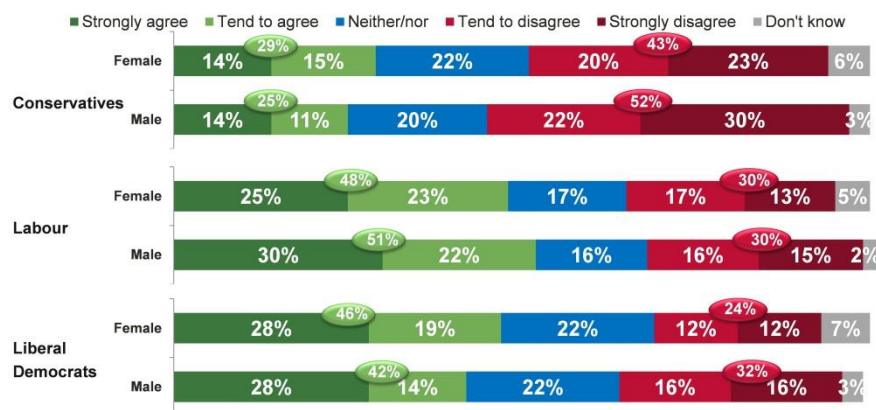
4.2 To swap or not to swap?

If we bring in this chart, Mr Miliband's problems seem worse still. It becomes clear that it is his party, rather than him, attracting the female vote when we see that 48% of women think Labour should remove him as leader before next May - a very similar figure to the 51% of men who think the same.

Compare that with Mr Cameron's score here, and we see that the Labour leader faces a big challenge. The situation is almost as bad for Mr Clegg.

Neither men nor women think the Conservatives should change leader; but half think Labour should

On balance do you agree or disagree with the following statement: the Conservative/Labour/Liberal Democrat party should change their leader before next year's election.



Base: 1,001 British adults 18+, 14th - 17th June 2014

Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

4.3 Do women “like” the leaders and their policies?

Women are also more likely to “like” David Cameron than Ed Miliband, but for each leader, over half of women express dislike. Although Mr Farage’s satisfaction rates are better than the other leaders among women, he is the one whom female voters say they like least of all.

And the policies receive a similarly negative response. 60% say they don’t like the policies of Mr Cameron and Mr Clegg. And the situation is not much better for the others.

Do women like the leaders and their policies?

Which of these statements come closest to your view of... and his policies?

	David Cameron	Ed Miliband	Nick Clegg	Nigel Farage
	%	%	%	%
	<u>Women</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Women</u>
I like him and I like his policies	27	19	16	18
I like him but I do not like his policies	16	14	20	8
I do not like him but I like his policies	6	12	10	7
I do not like him and I do not like his policies	44	40	40	47
Don't know	7	17	14	20
Total like him	43	33	36	26
Total do not like him	50	52	50	54
Total like his policies	33	31	26	25
Total do not like his policies	60	54	60	55

Base: 1,000 British adults 18+, 12th – 15th July 2014

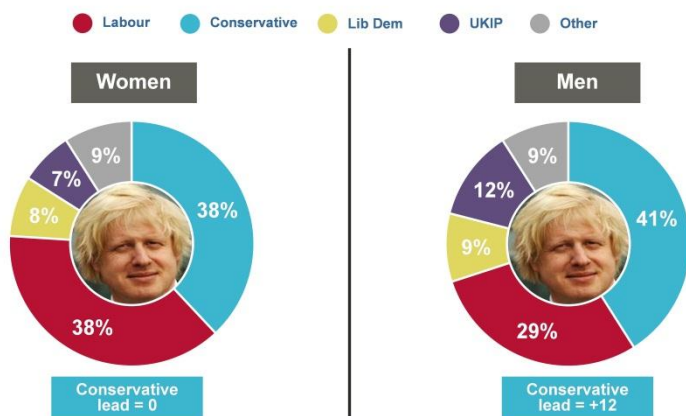
Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

4.4 But what about Boris, George and Theresa?

London Mayor Boris Johnson has been selected to stand for a parliamentary seat at the next election and these results show that women are more likely to say they would back a Boris-led Conservative party. This polling shows his presence at the helm could create a strong lead among male voters, and squash Labour's lead among women to zero.

The Conservative lead is larger among men with Boris as leader, but...

"If Boris Johnson was leader of the Conservative Party, Ed Miliband leader of the Labour Party and Nick Clegg leader of the Liberal Democrat Party, how would you vote if there were a General Election tomorrow? Would you vote for..."



Base: 1,003 British adults 18+, 9th – 11th August 2014. Figures are based on all voters and exclude those who are undecided, would not vote or refused.

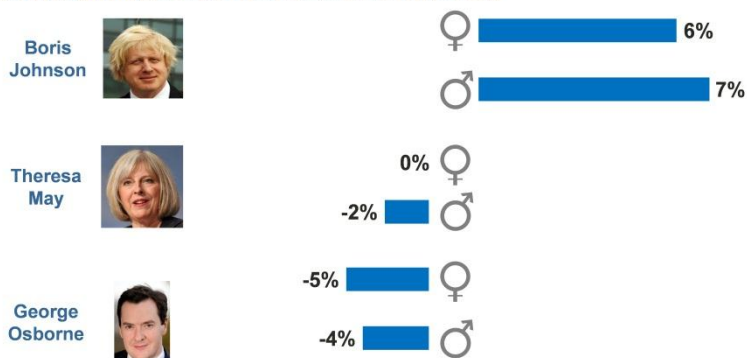
Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

...the rise in Conservative vote share is similar among both genders

"If Boris Johnson / Theresa May / George Osborne was leader of the Conservative Party, Ed Miliband leader of the Labour Party and Nick Clegg leader of the Liberal Democrat Party, how would you vote if there were a General Election tomorrow? Would you vote for..."

% change in hypothetical Conservative vote share with different leaders

Current (August 2014) Conservative voting intention: women 32%, men 34%



Base: 1,003 British adults 18+, 9th – 11th August 2014. Figures are based on all voters and exclude those who are undecided, would not vote or refused. The 'rise' figure is based on August 2014 Conservative voting intention (certain to vote).

Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

The same cannot be said of alternative contenders. Theresa May would make no difference to the party's support among both men and women, according to this poll, which also suggests the appointment of George Osborne would have a negative impact among voters of both sexes.

However, we must be aware that it is very difficult to judge how the electorate will feel about a political leader before he or she has taken office; consider how perceptions of Gordon Brown changed once he began running the Labour party and the country.

5 The Switchers

It's fascinating to look a little deeper into voters' former views, and see how they've shifted. Of those declaring themselves certain to vote Labour in 2015, 70% were Labour voters in 2010 while 30% came from elsewhere. 14% of those backed Nick Clegg's party last time round; 5% voted for minor parties. The Tories themselves are retaining far more of their former supporters; 84% backed the Conservatives last time, compared with 16% who have come from elsewhere. Of the 16%, only 3% were Lib Dem voters, suggesting this group is shifting more heavily to Labour. Ukip, meanwhile, is drawing its support from all areas – but the biggest single group certain to vote UKIP among both sexes is those who backed the Tories in 2010. They represent 36% of Ukip's female vote – three times the 12% who previously backed Labour.



36%

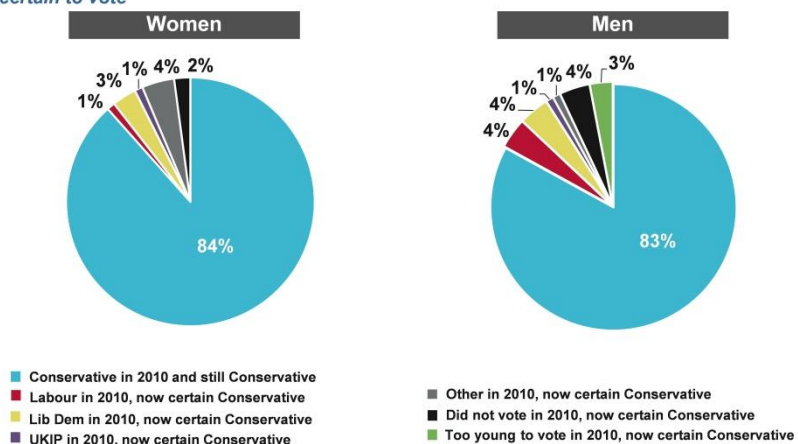
The proportion of current female UKIP supporters who voted Conservative in 2010.



Current Conservative vote coming mostly from 2010 Conservatives among men and women

"How would you vote if there were a general election tomorrow?"*

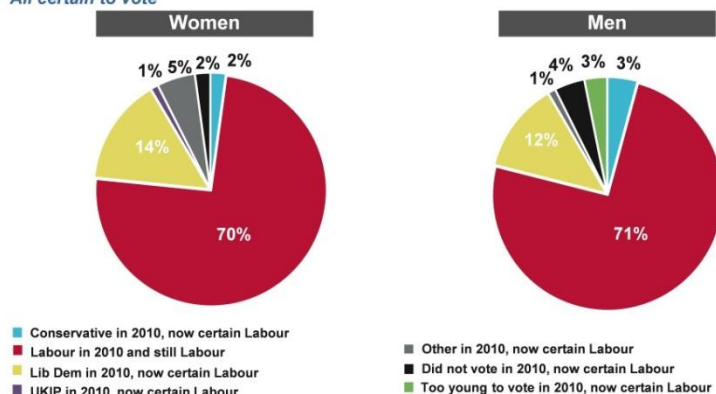
*All certain to vote



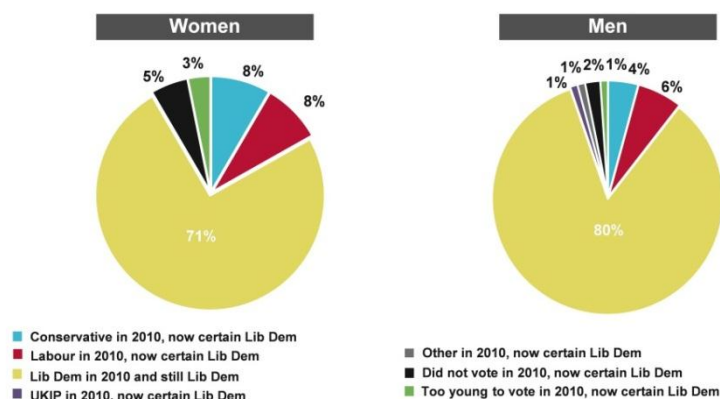
Current Labour vote coming mostly from 2010 Labour among men and women

"How would you vote if there were a general election tomorrow?"*

*All certain to vote



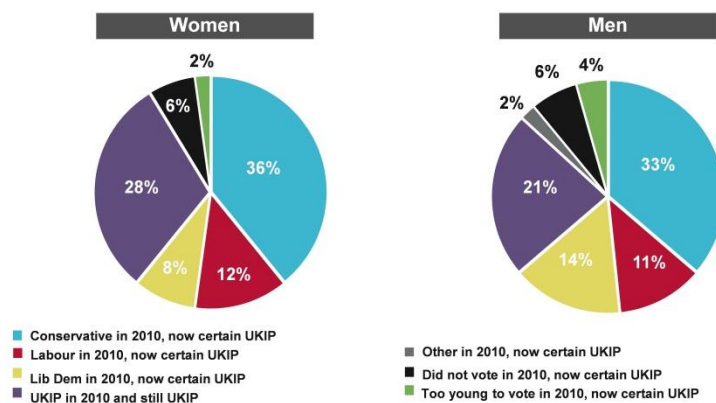
Current LibDem male voters slightly more likely to have voted for them in 2010



Rise of UKIP shown in support coming from all parties – but especially 2010 Conservatives

"How would you vote if there were a general election tomorrow?"*

*All certain to vote



6 The Issues

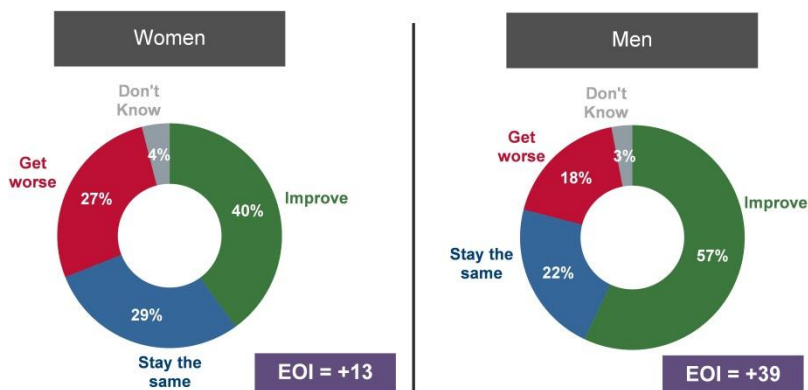
6.1 Economic optimists?

The charts below show that women are significantly less optimistic about the economy than men, with only four out of 10 expecting conditions to improve over the next year; over a quarter believing things will get worse, which may explain some of the enduring support for Labour.

The government is clearly hoping that an economic upturn will help the prospects of both Conservatives and Lib Dems – but that will only happen if voters believe them. Labour's focus on the cost of living crisis might resonate more with women, as they're more likely to be in charge of household budgets. Clearly, various economic factors (what happens to energy bills in the winter, for example) will feed into the competing narratives of the Coalition and the opposition.

Economic Optimism Index - by gender: women much less optimistic

"Do you think that the general economic condition of the country will improve, stay the same or get worse over the next 12 months?"



Base: Aggregated economic optimism ratings of 7,053 British adults 18+ Jan- July 2014, 3,611 women, 3,442 men

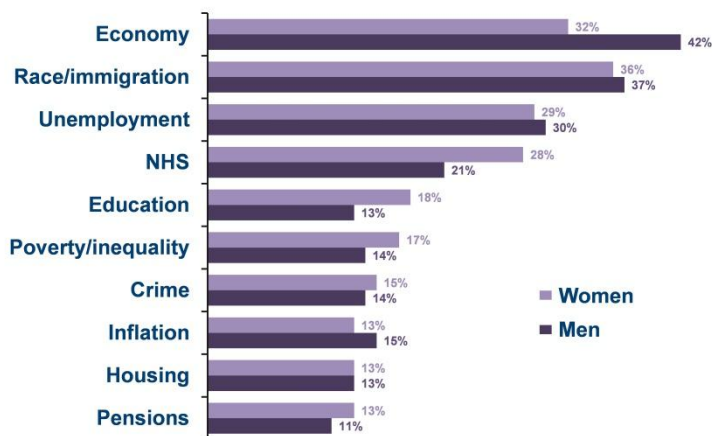
Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

6.2 How the issues rank

This chart contains a surprise. Last year, women ranked the economy as their top priority, followed by unemployment, then race/immigration. This year, race/immigration comes up as the number one concern for women, overtaking both other factors. The mood is consistent with the rise of the Eurosceptic Ukip party and its focus on concerns around immigration into Britain from eastern Europe - but it could also be explained by the fact that there is less cohesion among women voters this year when it comes to priorities; many have cited health, education or poverty as their key issue, rather than the economy.

The economy is seen as the most important issue among men; whilst women more likely to cite NHS, education, and poverty/inequality

"What do you see as the main/other important issues facing Britain today?"



Base: aggregated mentions of each statement being an issue of 5,889 British adults 18+, Jan-June 2014

Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

7 Behind the statistics: Mumsnet and Gransnet users speak out

Alongside the quantitative analysis offered in this report, Mumsnet and Gransnet carried out research among six online focus groups in an attempt to delve more deeply into what is driving the headline figures.

The women were divided into six groups: women without children; grandmothers; political don't knows; stay-at-home-mothers; working mothers; and 'older' mothers – aged between 40 and 50.

They were asked a series of questions to trigger discussion about political parties, their leaders, the issues that fire them and how they're thinking of voting in 2015.

David Cameron attracts a mix of positive and negative comments. There are those who consider him out of touch: His background doesn't let him see what life is like out of his privileged bubble," says one mum over 40.

But there are also those who respect him as a Prime Ministerial figure who, they say, has turned the economy around. He "has got results", says one woman who is not a mother.

Ed Miliband and Nick Clegg get tougher rides. They are "weak leaders", says one stay-at-home-mother.

In fact, the word "weak" comes up repeatedly for both men. Although many of the women are likely to vote Labour, its leader comes in for a great deal of criticism.

There is some praise for Mr Miliband's recent speeches (one woman says that might swing her vote), for his attempts to engage with women and for the fact that he's seen as more genuine than his counterparts. But a worrying theme for Labour is that many of these women can't imagine him in the top job.

"I would feel more confident voting Labour if Miliband was NOT in charge," says another older mother.

But Mr Miliband might take some comfort from the still-worse response to his Lib Dem counterpart, from whom Labour is likely to take a significant volume of votes.

Last year many Mumsnet users described how they felt betrayed by Nick Clegg. This year he is again accused on numerous occasions of



"[David Cameron's] background doesn't let him see what life is like out of his privileged bubble".



"I would feel more confident voting Labour if Miliband was NOT in charge".



dishonesty. It is clear that the party's position on tuition fees has inflicted serious damage, causing people to question its (and therefore Clegg's) integrity. In the qualitative section of this analysis, there is little sign of that anger easing off.

"I look for a leader I trust (never again Mr Clegg!)" gripes one woman – who chooses to stay at home and look after her children.

However, the Lib Dems are often described as street fighters who focus their efforts locally on what they call the 'ground war'. National polls cannot allow us fully to judge those types of constituency fights – and there are certainly women in this study who say they might vote Lib Dem because of an impressive local MP.

Then there is focus on a new figure on the political landscape: Nigel Farage, whose Ukip can hardly be ignored after coming top in the European elections, and leapfrogging the Lib Dems in national polls.

He receives praise for being the most sincere of the four men, willing to stand up for what he believes ("Nigel makes us feel different, like he is telling the truth"). Others, however, express strong dislike, calling him too insular and anti-feminist. Interestingly, some manage to take both views – arguing that he achieves the important feat of appearing sincere, but that unfortunately, he says nothing that they can agree with.

The more favourable views towards Mr Farage are found among older mums and grandmothers, although within these groups are some who strongly dislike him. The same two groups are probably warmest towards Mr Cameron and the Conservatives, reflecting the polling.

The same is true of stay-at-home-mums. However, a sense emerges from some of them that they feel let down by this Government – particularly over the issue of child benefit.

"As I don't work, I feel that David Cameron (and Clegg) feel I am a second-class citizen," says one.

But perhaps the overriding sense in these focus groups is of women who are frustrated with all the options on the table.



"Nigel makes us feel different, like he is telling the truth".



7.1 Is this the best they can offer?

That sense of frustration with all options has led some women to question whether they will vote at all.

"I have voted in every (pointless) election since having turned 18, with the only exception being the day that I was so ill that I couldn't have made it

down the driveway, and yet I still felt bad for not trying,” writes one. “This time round I am seriously considering abstaining, and I seriously hate voter apathy.”

Another woman admits the same: “I’m not sure I will be voting at the next election - not something I ever thought I would say but I can’t agree on any party at this moment in time. This may change but at the minute, I don’t want any of them in a place of power.”

This longer comment is from a woman grouped as a ‘don’t know’ and, it would seem, not getting any closer to a decision. “DC comes across as too privileged and therefore out of touch; NC probably comes across as the most genuine in his desire to listen but actions? Not so sure. EM gives me the impression of saying the right things because he’s been told to, not because he genuinely is trying to understand, it all feels a bit hollow. NF I don’t really feel that much of his focus is or has been on women, so it’s a bit hard to judge.”

And finally a comment that sums up what a number try to express:

“Advice to party leaders, I have to be blunt here: be replaced, all of them. None of them appeal to me.”

Despite generalised dissatisfaction with all the leaders, the women do drill down into what is going on in each case.

7.1.1 David Cameron

Let’s start with the Prime Minister, about whom there is a range of opinion.

Among the positive comments are:

“Strong, likeable, charismatic.”

“Cameron is the best of them for me. He has more charisma than Miliband and Clegg and seems more honest.”

“Smooth, well-oiled.”

Others like him, but might prefer someone else, who could be in parliament soon.

“DC is relatively strong, speaks with conviction, fairly affable and well-liked. But Boris Johnson would be stronger.”

And a third (bigger) group are critical of him:



“This time round I am seriously considering abstaining, and I seriously hate voter apathy”.



“Cameron is the best of them for me. He has more charisma than Miliband and Clegg and seems more honest.”



"I look at Cameron and I see someone who is openly only interested in helping the rich and keeping the poor in their place."

"Patronising."

"I don't think he has a clue what it is like to be a working woman, let alone a single parent."

"No understanding of issues affecting people who are not wealthy."

7.1.2 Ed Miliband

Those impressed by Ed Miliband think he is trying hard to see things from their point of view.

"Does want to try to understand the different perspective of women."

"Approachable."

"Personable."

"More likely to take women's concerns seriously. He doesn't seem threatened by strong women in the shadow cabinet."

The Labour leader is not criticised for being out of touch, and is rarely described as disingenuous - but there are clearly things about him that put a lot of women off.

These comments are typical:

"He's not really made an impression on me in anything, really."

"Something about Ed M seems very weak and inexperienced."

"Doesn't inspire me with any confidence that he will be a good advocate for Britain."

"I've always voted Labour in the past but am finding it really, really hard to have much respect for Ed Miliband."

Yet despite the number of negative comments, the voting intentions suggest women are significantly more likely to vote Labour than Conservative. And that may be in part because so many voters on the left do not see the Lib Dems as a credible alternative. Mr Miliband may be relieved to see the reception given by women to Mr Clegg has not improved over the past 12 months.



"[Ed Miliband is] more likely to take women's concerns seriously. He doesn't seem threatened by strong women in the shadow cabinet".



7.1.3 Nick Clegg

It is difficult to find much outright support for the Lib Dem leader, although some think he has been criticised unfairly:

"Of all the leaders I believe Clegg is the most genuine and has been unfortunate in the public and press's lack of understanding that as a minority in a coalition Government he is unable to deliver all the manifesto promises," says one. The decision to enter the Coalition in the first place and subsequent policy compromises (some seen by voters as u-turns) appear to have damaged the reputation of the Lib Dems most deeply. Mr Clegg's issue, according to this study, is trust:

"I want to feel the party leader has courage in their convictions, not to rescind on pre-election promises. Take note Nick Clegg!"

"Integrity. That is where Clegg falls down."

"Seems to be a really nice chap, but hasn't followed through on his promises."

"Far too much Cameron's puppet."

The Lib Dems will be disappointed; they have, perhaps more than others, tried hard to appeal to women voters. Mr Clegg was the driving force for policies that might be expected to appeal, such as parental leave, free school meals and free nursery places for 40% of two-year-olds.

In contrast, Ukip has not gone out of its way to target female voters, but it's straightforward style and anti-Europe stance has attracted a significant level of support among some women – and a great deal of dislike among others.

7.1.4 Nigel Farage

The Ukip leader attracts a Marmite response from the women who took part in the study. Some think he is the only political leader who offers integrity, as in these comments:

"I think Nigel Farage is a strong and charismatic leader. He would be a strong PM."

"A good party leader is not afraid to speak their mind. Out of the leaders listed Nigel Farage ticks all the boxes."

"I think he is probably more clued up about ordinary people like me and things that affect me than any of them. He does seem to have the common touch and I think really listens to what people have to say to him."



"Of all the leaders I believe Clegg is the most genuine and has been unfortunate in the public and press's lack of understanding".



Others have a visceral dislike for him:

"A bad leader is someone like Farage who rides the crest of his own charisma but denies all the knowledge of the people in his team. He would be a terrifying PM - though very little risk!"

"Nigel Farage actually scares me as he can sound so reasonable but scratch the surface and there are some very scary views hiding there."

"Nigel Farage I do not like and would never vote for."

"Clueless, naive and annoying."

But interestingly, there is a third group who take a different view. They believe Mr Farage to be the most genuine of the leaders, but wish he was saying something very different.

"I do not condone a lot of what he says... although I've got to admire the fact he's willing to stand up against the EU and anyone who has public row with Nick Clegg goes up a few entertainment points with me!"

"Farage seems most genuine; he is fighting for a cause at least. Unfortunately the cause defies common sense."

"Only one who believes what he says but I wish he didn't (cos don't support belief!)"

"Nigel Farage: says what most people are thinking and I do believe these are his genuine thoughts - but is he a loose cannon?"



"I do not condone a lot of what he [Nigel Farage] says... although I've got to admire the fact he's willing to stand up against the EU".

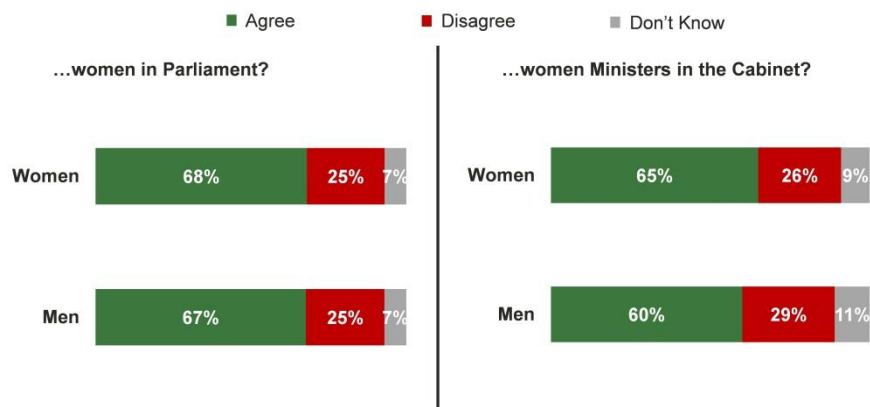


7.2 Women moving through the ranks... and that reshuffle

A large majority of women and men think the government would be better with more women in parliament and at the Cabinet table (as the chart below shows).

Both genders agree that more women holding public office would be good for Britain's governance

"On balance do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Britain would be better governed if there were more..."



Base: 1,003 British adults 18+, 9th – 11th August 2014

Source: Ipsos MORI Political Monitor

The focus groups reflect that belief – although there is some resistance to the idea of people being promoted for their gender rather than their ability.

"I'm slightly uncomfortable that JUST because we're women we have issues that can only be truly understood by women," says one grandmother. But she does add that society could benefit from more women in senior positions, as long as they're placed there on merit.

Others agree. One calls Mr Cameron's recent reshuffle a "positive step" – suggesting that more things that concern women might now be brought to the fore.

But overall the response to the prime minister's shake-up is much more cynical.

"I can't work out if he really thinks women are stupid enough to be taken in by his ridiculous tokenism," says one.

Another calls it a "complete farce" that shows the Conservatives are treating women with "contempt". She argues that promoting women after four years is a "travesty – like saying men have done all the work so we will pop in some women to please female voters."

One woman calls it a "tactic"; another describes it as a "laughable attempt to appeal to women and another labelling it "window dressing"

7.3 Coalition

The women were also asked what they felt about the first coalition government in the UK for decades. The views are mixed, although they too tend towards the cynical and negative.

"I had high hopes for the coalition but it has turned out to be a farce," says one woman in the group of 'older' mothers. "I think it has been a car crash," adds another, who accuses the Conservatives of bullying the Lib Dems. A third argues that coalitions represent too little ideology. Some suggest the Lib Dems were "swallowed and destroyed" by the process.

There was a similar reaction from the stay-at-home mothers. One pointed out that those who voted for either party felt "cheated". "A disaster," adds one woman without children. "A complete disaster," echoes another.

There are working mothers who "liked nothing about it" and grandmothers who feel that Nick Clegg has "blackmailed" the Conservatives.

But throughout there are positive comments too.

One suggests that it means the Tories had to tone down some policies; another that a partnership would always be "weaker in some ways".

The women without children put forward a more mixed position. "A Coalition has allowed greater negotiations and perspectives to come into play," claims one. Good in theory, adds another, although she is less impressed in practice: "I think if Clegg had been a stronger character it could have been great." One working mum argues that "everyone has been surprised by how well the coalition worked". She claims the Lib Dems have "smoothed out some of the more unpalatable Tory policies", but worries that the result has been a little too middle of the road. One grandmother says things have worked out "very well" overall.

8 Methodological note

This quantitative analysis, conducted for Mumsnet, is based on Ipsos MORI polling research available in August, consisting mostly of Political Monitor polls conducted in 2014.

Where relevant, data on voting intentions and some other attitudes measured regularly has been aggregated over several months to allow for more robust measurement of sub-populations (for example, aggregates based on polls from January – July 2014 consist of roughly 7,000 interviews, and c.3,600 who are certain to vote)

Estimates of voting and turnout at elections are based on the aggregation of all Ipsos MORI polls during the campaign, weighted at regional level to the final outcome

Data is mostly drawn from interviews conducted by telephone, and is representative of Great Britain (excluding Northern Ireland) unless otherwise stated

It must be borne in mind that most individual surveys are based on c. 1,000 interviews in total, and that small differences in findings between genders and groups within gender may therefore not be statistically significant. Questions showing results from individual monthly polls will contain around 500 men and 500 women. As they are one-off questions with relatively small base sizes the individual data should be treated with some caution.

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About MUMSNET

Mumsnet is the UK's largest network for parents, with over 60 million page views and over 12 million visits per month. It has 180 local sites and a network of 5,500 bloggers. It regularly campaigns on issues including support for families of children with SEN, improvements in miscarriage care and and freedom of speech on the internet.

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